

The Children's Healthline

communicating today's environmental problems to protect our children's future



Pesticides and Child Safety

Pesticides on Food

Pound for pound, children consume higher amounts of fresh produce than adults and their bodies are still developing, making them particularly vulnerable to the toxic effects of pesticides. Furthermore, the National Research Council estimates that half of all the pesticides a person ingests in a lifetime occurs during the first five years of life. The good news is that EPA's pesticide regulatory process is designed to ensure children are protected from unreasonable risks. As a result, the food supply in the United States is among the safest in the world. Keeping in mind that few things in life are risk free, however, and that there is often a lag time between scientific discoveries and regulatory changes, you may wish to take some of the following steps to reduce your child's exposure to pesticides for many fruits and vegetables contain low levels of pesticide residues as a result of legal use of these products.

Select clean produce that is free of dirt, cuts, insect holes, mold and decay

Wash or scrub produce under running water without using soap. This is more effective than soaking, though neither can remove all pesticide residues.

Peel off the skin or outer leaves of fruit and vegetables.

See that your children **eat a greater variety of fruits and vegetables and from a greater range of sources.** This will increase the variety of essential vitamins and minerals while lessening exposure to any one pesticide. Health professionals recommend that the diets of children contain at least five servings of fruits and vegetables every day.

Consult with your grocer regarding **produce grown using fewer or no pesticides.**

Pesticides in and Aaround the Home

While significant media attention has been placed on the safety of our food, particularly from pesticide residue on fruits and vegetables, scientists in R3's Waste and Chemicals Management Division tell us that those risks are much lower than those our children face from the unsafe handling and storage of pesticides and other chemicals around the home. Insect sprays, rat poisons, lawn and garden chemicals, and other household products can present a much more serious threat. Children can be exposed to pesticides by direct contact and inhalation, as well as, through their food.

In 1995 alone, an estimated 79,000 children were involved in common household pesticide-related poisonings or exposures in the U.S..

Long term exposure to pesticides have been linked to cancer, Parkinson's disease and other health concerns. Acute poisoning and even death can result from ingestion or extreme cases of direct contact.

Nearly half of all U.S. households with children under five have at least one pesticide stored in a location accessible to the children. This figure increases to 75% when all households are taken into account.

The average American home contains 25 gallons of hazardous chemicals.

What Can a Parent Do?

- **Practice pollution prevention.** First, try **Integrated Pest Management (IPM)** to eliminate or reduce the use chemical pesticides in and around the home. If you use a lawn care company seek one that uses such practices. Use the least hazardous product that will accomplish the task.

Bottled Water Update !

In the last issue of The Children's Healthline we reported on some of the differences and concerns relative to municipal water and bottled water. Since then the National Resources Defense Council came out with a report titled, "Bottled Water - Pure Drink or Pure Hype?" In it they point out problems of misleading advertising and regulatory gaps. In brief, bottled water is not always as pure and safe as we're led to believe, they say. The full report is accessible via their Internet site, www.nrdc.org. Check it out, particularly if your kids are among the third of all Americans who drink bottled water on a regular basis.

Safer Alternatives

You may also choose to use safer alternatives to common household products that can be hazardous. Information on them can be found from many environmental agencies and groups; for starters try one of these sites: www.lalc.k12.ca.us/target/units/recycle/toxic_alt.html or www.users.interport.net/~conyc/HTMLPE/detox.htm

Always **store pesticides in a locked cabinet** away from children's reach; even if you don't have children, there may be times children visit your home or play in your yard. Child-proof safety latches, available at hardware stores, can be installed on cabinet doors.

Read the label first and **follow directions** to the letter, including precautions and restrictions.

Before applying pesticides, indoors or outdoors, **remove children and their toys and pets from the area** and keep them away until the pesticide has dried or as long as is recommended on the label.

Never transfer pesticides to other containers (e.g., milk or juice bottles) that may be mistaken by you or children as something else.

Use child-resistant packaging properly by closing the container tightly.

Alert other care-givers to pesticides and other potentially harmful products to be avoided.

Teach children that pesticides are poisons - something not to touch.

Finally, keep the telephone number of your **Poison Control Center** near your telephone. The number for Southeast Pennsylvania is (215) 386-2100.

For more information on pesticides try these Internet sites:

EPA: www.epa.gov/pesticides/food

(for tips on how the government regulates pesticides, what the pesticide residue limits are on food, why children may be especially sensitive to pesticides, what *Integrated Pest Management* means, what organically grown means)

USDA and other IPM sites:

www.nysaes.cornell.edu/ipmnet/index.html

www.ree.usda.gov/nipmn/

For more information on the Children's Environmental Health Program, contact Gail Tindal at (215) 814-2069 or Dan Welker at (215) 814-2744.